

# ANY QUESTIONS ?

*Asking questions is essential for learning. But how you ask a question can make a huge difference in where it leads you.*

**By David A. Edwards**  
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**W**hen you were a child, the world was a bit of a mystery. You were naturally curious and probably asked a lot of questions about how things work and what things mean and why things are the way they are. And you trusted your parents and other adults as they helped you understand what you needed to know at the time.

Now, as a teenager, you are learning more and more about the world, both in school and through your own experience. You still have questions, some of them deep and searching, but you're probably trying to figure things out on your own a little more.

These questions you're asking inevitably include things related to the gospel and the Church. Whether you were raised in the Church or learned about it only recently, your study, pondering, and experience can lead you to more—and more complex—questions about the gospel.

### **Questioning vs. Asking Questions**

There are basically two different ways we can approach our questions. For our purposes here, we'll distinguish between these approaches by labeling them *questioning* and *asking questions*. When it comes to matters of faith, there can be a pretty big difference

between the two. The difference has to do with how and why you're asking the questions, what you hope to gain from them, and where they'll eventually lead you.

*Questioning*, here, refers to challenging, disputing, or picking something apart. When it comes to religion, the result of this approach is often not to find answers but rather to find fault and destroy confidence.

On the other hand, in religion, just as in science or anything else worth studying, it's absolutely essential to *ask questions*, even difficult ones. It's the only way you'll get answers. And answers mean greater knowledge and understanding—and in the case of religion, greater faith and spirituality.

So, your attitude and your motive in asking a question can make all the difference in where it will eventually lead you. For instance, if you're studying the scriptures and come across a passage that seems to contradict a Church teaching or a scientific or historical fact, there's a big difference between asking "How could the scriptures (or the Church) possibly be true if . . . ?" and asking "What's the full context of this passage and what does it mean in light of . . . ?" The first question may lead you to a hastily drawn conclusion based on skepticism and doubt rather than actual knowledge or logic, whereas the second is more likely to lead you to greater insight and faith.

Though this example is a bit extreme, it illustrates how paying attention to the questions you ask and the reasons you ask them can help you to avoid drifting from *asking questions* into *questioning*.

### What If Something Doesn't Make Sense?

As you study and learn and pray, you may come across something that troubles you or



### FREEDOM AND DUTY

"As a Church, we encourage gospel scholarship and the search to understand all truth. Fundamental to our theology is belief in individual freedom of inquiry, thought, and expression. Constructive discussion is a privilege of every Latter-day Saint.

"But it is the greater obligation of every Latter-day Saint to move forward the work of the Lord, to strengthen His kingdom on the earth, to teach faith and build testimony in that which God has brought to pass in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "Keep the Faith," *Ensign*, Sept. 1985, 5–6.

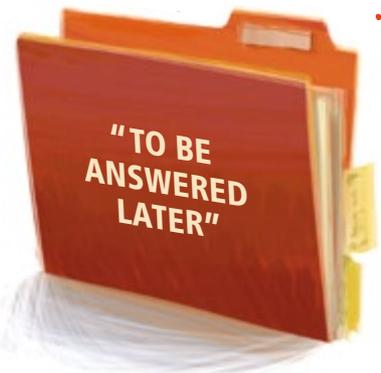
doesn't make sense to you no matter how much you try to understand it. What should you do then?

First, ask yourself, "How vital is this question to my overall understanding and testimony of the gospel?" If you feel it really is important, try as best you can to resolve it, and ask for help from someone you trust, such as a parent, Church leader, or seminary teacher. This process can even be beneficial, as President Howard W. Hunter (1907–1995) explained: "I have sympathy for young men and young women when honest doubts enter their minds and they engage in the great conflict of resolving doubts. These doubts can be resolved, if they have an honest desire to know the truth, by exercising moral, spiritual, and mental effort. They will emerge from the conflict into a firmer, stronger, larger faith because of the struggle. They have gone from a simple, trusting faith, through doubt and conflict, into a solid substantial faith which ripens into testimony" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1960, 108).

If you find that a question isn't that important, set it aside in your mental "To Be Answered Later" file. Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said that as we "remain steady and patient"

Motive FAITH  
Attitude  
ASK  
? What?  
HOW Obtain WHAT

LEARN MOTIVE How  
Why What IVE  
FAITH? WHY  
Motive What  
TESTIMONY  
ASK  
? What?  
GROW Obtain LEARN  
WHY Attitude?  
Attitude Motive Why  
MOTIVE How  
? ASK Attitude  
Faith? Motive What?



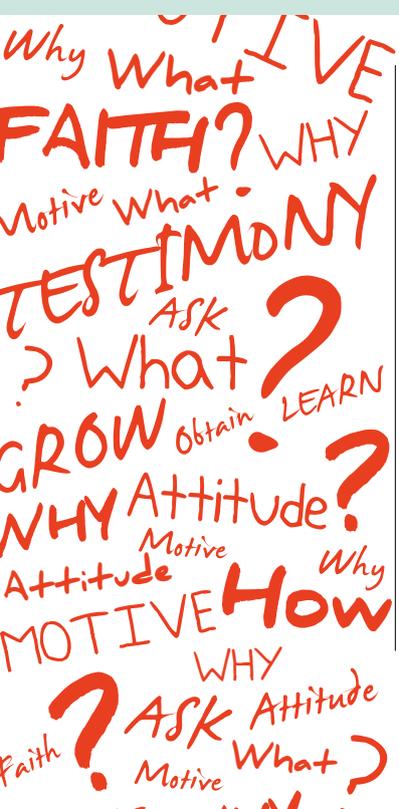


### DISPELLING DOUBT

“Remember that faith and doubt cannot exist in the same mind at the same time, for one will dispel the other.

“Should doubt knock at your doorway, just say to those skeptical, disturbing, rebellious thoughts: ‘I propose to stay with my faith, with the faith of my people. I know that happiness and contentment are there, and I forbid you, agnostic, doubting thoughts, to destroy the house of my faith. I acknowledge that I do not understand the processes of creation, but I accept the fact of it. I grant that I cannot explain the miracles of the Bible, and I do not attempt to do so, but I accept God’s word. I wasn’t with Joseph, but I believe him. My faith did not come to me through science, and I will not permit so-called science to destroy it.’ ”

President Thomas S. Monson, “The Lighthouse of the Lord,” *New Era*, Feb. 2001, 9.



through our lives, “at times, the Lord’s answer will be, ‘You don’t know everything, but you know enough’—enough to keep the commandments and to do what is right” (“You Know Enough,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 13).

Because we choose to press forward in faith even though we don’t have the answer to every question, some people may accuse us of exercising “blind obedience” or of being “anti-intellectual.” Is this a fair claim? Are there some things we aren’t allowed to study or questions we aren’t allowed to ask? Well, no, not really.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once said to a group

of young people: “You will hear allegations that the Church is ‘anti-intellectual.’ . . . *You* are the greatest evidence to refute such an erroneous statement. Individually, you have been encouraged to learn and to seek knowledge from any dependable source. In the Church, we embrace *all* truth, whether it comes from the scientific laboratory or from the revealed word of the Lord. We accept all *truth* as being part of the gospel” (“Begin with the End in Mind,” *Brigham Young University 1984–85 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [1985], 17).

### A Diet of Doubt vs. a Feast of Faith

If you focus entirely on the intellect in your gospel study, you run the risk of spiritual malnutrition, because questioning and skepticism are pretty thin gruel. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has explained: “There are those whose intellectual approach to spiritual things has left them spiritually undernourished and vulnerable to doubts and misgivings. . . . The things of God, including a spiritual conversion and testimony, must be transmitted in the Lord’s way, ‘by the Spirit’” (“Nourishing the Spirit,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1998, 9–10).

A diet of doubt will starve your spirit, but a feast of faith will feed you “even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (Alma 32:42). Asking questions doesn’t need to cause doubt, though. In fact, it can help you build your faith. So keep asking good questions. Keep studying and praying and thinking deeply. As you do, the Holy Ghost will help you recognize which questions leave you spiritually famished and which ones lead you to “feast upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3). **NE**